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ABSTRACT

A program was developed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family-oriented literacy services to homeless parents of young children. By taking the program directly into four bridge or transitional housing sites in Greater Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative of Goodwill Industries believed that the result would be an increase in the amount of time parents spent reading to their children. A four-session workshop developed for the Allegheny County Head Start program was expanded to six sessions and tailored for the parents in the bridge housing programs. Each session focused on a different type of children's book and exposed parents to a variety of ways to use the books with their children. Parents were also taught craft activities to extend the ideas in the stories. A total of 48 women benefited as a result of their participation in this project with 98 children benefiting indirectly. The program was evaluated on a weekly basis and at the end of the six-session workshop by the instructor to determine if content was appropriate for the women. The bridge housing program staff evaluated the effectiveness of the workshop in a letter to the project supervisor and said the program improved relationships between the women and their children. Participants evaluated the workshop sessions in a written paragraph. (Participant and bridge housing staff evaluations are appended.) (YLB)

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FAMILY LITERACY FOR PARENTS IN BRIDGE HOUSING

Judith Aaronson, Project Director
Shelli Glanz, Project Supervisor
Penny Klosterman-Lang, Project Instructor

Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative

1992-1993

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203
(412) 481-9005

$5,675

98-3046

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Abstract

Title: Family Literacy for Parents in Bridge Housing

Project Number: 983046 **Funding:** $5,675

Director: Judith Aaronson **Phone:** (412) 481-9005

Address: Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh/ Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative (PLI)
2600 East Carson Street, 6th. floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Description:

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh/ PLI proposed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family literacy services to homeless parents of young children by taking the program directly into bridge housing sites where the families reside. This eliminated institutional and situational barriers to participation. The approach offered was the direct parent/ indirect child model. The curriculum came from adaptations of other's work, as well as instructor developed activities to reinforce the lessons.

Objectives:

The primary objective for this project was to increase the amount of time that homeless parents residing in bridge housing facilities spent in independent literacy activities with their children. The specific activity targeted was reading aloud to the children.

Target Audience:

The target audience for this program was parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who were residing in any of four bridge housing facilities located in the Greater Pittsburgh area. Due to the populations served by these agencies, all participants were women. Child care was provided while the parents were participating in the workshops.

Method of Evaluation:

The program was evaluated on a weekly basis and at the end of the six session workshop by the instructor to determine if the content was appropriate for and acceptable to the women at the bridge housing programs. The bridge housing program staff evaluated the effectiveness of the workshop by writing a one page letter to the project supervisor upon the conclusion of the workshop sessions. Participants also evaluated the workshop sessions at the last session by writing a paragraph concerning their feelings about the workshop and how reading aloud has improved or changed their relationships with their children.

Findings/ Conclusions:

Women in bridge housing programs typically do not spend enough quality time with their young children. The "Read Me a Story" workshops provided useful knowledge, books and materials for these women to spend some quality time reading with their children. The bridge housing staff also stated that the program improved the relationships between the women and their children.

FAMILY LITERACY FOR PARENTS IN BRIDGE HOUSING

Introduction

This program was developed to demonstrate an effective delivery system for providing family-oriented literacy services to homeless parents of young children. By taking the program directly into bridge or transitional housing sites where the families reside, Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative of Goodwill Industries (PLI-GWI) believed that the result would be an increase in the amount of time that the parents spent reading to their children. When parents actively read aloud to children, literacy levels of both parent and child can improve. Children who are read to at home on a regular basis are better prepared for school learning than those children who are not read to by family or caregivers. (Anderson, Hiebert, et.al., 1985)

PLI- GWI successfully developed and implemented a four session workshop series for the Allegheny County Head Start program during the 1991-92 program year entitled, "Read Me a Story." The workshop was expanded to six sessions and tailored for the parents in the bridge housing programs which were serviced in this Special Demonstration project from 7/1/92 to 6/30/93. Each session focused on a different type of children's book and exposed parents to a variety of ways to use the books with their children including asking questions while reading and making predictions. Parents were also taught craft activities to extend the ideas in the stories such as making puppets and making concept books to use with their children outside of the workshop setting. Many of the ideas for this workshop were adapted from the New Reader's Press program entitled, Family Reading, and from Literacy Volunteers of America's Reading With Children.

Staff who worked on this project included: Shelli Glanz who developed the original " Read Me a Story" workshop and supervised the project, and

Penny Klosterman-Lang who adapted and taught the workshops for the Bridge Housing programs.

This project can be easily replicated for programs dealing with families in sheltered environments. A variety of books can be used if the recommended materials are not available. The important aspects of the workshop were emphasis on reading aloud to children and discussion of issues brought out in the books as they related to the participants' lives.

Copies of this report are available through:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education
AdvancE Office
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
800-992-2283

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to a study conducted by the New York Family Services Project of Bank Street College (1991), homeless women are significantly less likely than poor but housed women to have attained a high school diploma or GED. Data collected by Molnar, Rath, and Klein (1990) indicate that homeless children exhibit developmental problems more often than poor but housed children and far more often than the general population. Bassuk et al (1986, 1987, 1988) found that 47-54 % of homeless preschoolers screened in her study displayed at least one serious impairment in language, social skills, or motor development.

It is obvious that the problems faced by homeless families are complex and that an interdisciplinary approach to serving them is necessary. Homeless parents are often poorly educated and may display a dysfunctional relationship with their children, making shared reading experiences unlikely. These parents, while dealing with a multitude of serious problems on a daily basis, may not recognize their role as the first and most important teacher of their young children. If parents accept this important role by learning how to read to them effectively, parents will improve their own skills interrupting the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy in families. The "Read Me a Story" workshop introduces parents to a variety of childrens' books and activities that will provide them with a reason to interact with their children in a positive way for a few minutes each day. It is hoped that these activities will lead to a more functional relationship between the parents and children.

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Family Literacy for Parents in Bridge Housing was to increase the amount of time that parents spent reading to their children on a permanent basis. To reach this goal parents at four bridge housing programs in Allegheny County were recruited for a six week "Read Me a Story" workshop to be presented at their residences.

The objectives of the six week workshops were:

(1) To introduce bridge housing parents to the importance of reading aloud to children through modeling techniques of interactive reading using a variety of quality children's books.

(2) To introduce the four areas of the language arts (listening, speaking, writing and reading) and to teach parents to use them during the workshop sessions and to encourage use of language activities when interacting with their children in daily life at home, on walks, at the grocery store, etc.

(3) To demonstrate to parents how to use the public library to choose age appropriate books for children based on the children's interests. Parents will acquire a library card and meet personally with the a children's librarian during one of the workshop sessions.

(4) To increase interactive time between parents and children using reading related activities such as making puppets to help tell a story, creating home made concept (ABC, counting, color, etc.) and family story books, creating wordless stories using doodles drawn by the children, and writing language experience stories together.

(5) To expand the parents' reading interests by reading and discussing a variety of adult oriented readings excerpted from fiction and non-fiction.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This family literacy project was designed to remove institutional barriers to participation by providing on-site services to parents and children in bridge housing facilities. A variation of the direct parent/ indirect child model was utilized in the "Read Me a Story" workshops at these programs. Adults received instruction on how to use children's books effectively with their families in an informal workshop setting, while their children were cared for in a separate area of the facility. Participants received their own copies of the children's books and many handouts at each of the six sessions.

Phase 1: Planning (July - September 1992)

Four bridge housing programs were chosen for this project by Ella Holsinger, Administrative Assistant at Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, who coordinated the organization of GWI's Bridge Housing Program. Ms. Holsinger attended meetings of bridge housing coordinators where staff expressed a need for more activities which would promote positive family interaction for residents of bridge housing. The idea of presenting a family reading workshop to parents and interested staff appealed to four programs that serviced women and children. The original four were: the YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh (Wilkinsburg), Debra House (Braddock, PA), Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, and HEART House of Goodwill Industries. Since HEART House did not have enough residents to have a workshop, its' residents attended a family literacy workshop at Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative of Goodwill Industries. In April 1993, a workshop was added at Sojourner House, a bridge housing program for former substance abusers in the Garfield section of Pittsburgh.

Phase 2: Coordination (September 1992)

In the fall of 1992, the Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative Family Literacy Supervisor, Shelli Glanz, and Family Literacy Instructor, Penny Klosterman-Lang, met with the bridge housing staff to describe the format and content of the **six** session "Read Me a Story" workshop. Workshops were scheduled for each program one evening per week for **two hours** during the time when required family education groups were scheduled for residents. It was also decided that bridge housing staff would recruit child care workers from their part time staff who were already familiar with the program and the families.

Phase 3: Conducting the Workshops (October 1992 - May 1993)

Beginning in October, 1992 the family literacy instructor met with the participants. Before each workshop series, an **orientation** session was held to register the participants and to introduce the content of the family literacy workshop. Information concerning the local public library was distributed; pariticipants were encouraged to visit the library with their children and to sign up for a library card before the first session of the workshop.

Phase 4: Evaluation and Writing the Final Report (June 1993)

Workshop Calendar

The workshops were held in the following order:

YWCA Bridge Housing, Wilkinsburg, PA	Oct. - Nov. 1992
Debra House, Braddock, PA	Jan. - Feb. 1993
Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh	Feb. - Mar. 1993
Sojourner House, Pittsburgh, PA	Apr. - May. 1993

Workshop Content

Session 1 -- The Power of Reading and Storytelling

Children's Book: Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Adult Selection: passage from Black Boy by Richard Wright

Reading Strategy: Asking questions

Activity: Language experience stories

Session 2 ---Wordless Picture Books

Children's Book: The Snowman by Raymond Briggs

Adult Selection: Adult oriented wordless cartoon

Reading Strategy: Creating a story

Activity: Creating stories without words using doodles

Session 3 --- Concept Books (ABC, Counting, Colors, etc.)

Children's Book: Spot Looks at Shapes by Eric Hill

Reading Strategy: Observing and developing vocabulary

Activity: Making a simple concept book

Session 4 --- Family Stories (oral and written)

Children's Book: A Chair for My Mother by Vera Williams

Adult Selection: passage from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Reading Strategy: Asking quesions and making predictions

Activity: Creating a personal family history and family tree

Session 5 --- Folktales and Fables

Children's Book: The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone

Fable by A. Lobel: "The Mouse at the Seashore" from Fables

Reading Strategy: Making predictions

Activity: Making stick or bag puppets

Session 6 --- Poetry

Children's Book:	Surprises by L. B. Hopkins, ed.
Adult Selections:	Assortment of poems by M. Angelou, L. Hughes, and other contemporary poets.
Reading Strategy:	Rereading
Activity:	Writing poetry with children

RESULTS

Objectives 1 and 2

Each workshop session emphasized a particular theme. The workshop instructor used a quality children's book as the centerpiece of each session. To learn how to teach their children to be active listeners and readers, the participants observed the instructor modeling the use of pre- reading strategies such as previewing the book by looking at the cover and title, and active reading strategies such as asking questions, making predictions, creating stories, building vocabulary, and rereading while reading the book aloud. Participants also practiced the strategies with each other in the workshop session before using them privately with their children. These books also provided topics of discussion relating to real life issues such as saving money, working together for a common cause, survival after a fire, etc. Many participants in this population had difficulty opening up about some topics, while others used the workshop session to talk about something that they might have been holding inside until an incident in one of the readings allowed them to speak about it.

Whole language techniques played a major role in this project. Participants were encouraged to write questions, or predictions while reading the children's books at the sessions. They were introduced to the language experience method of writing so that they would feel comfortable creating stories with their children.

Objective 3

Participants were not able to leave the bridge housing program site with the instructor to obtain a library card. Instead they were given information about adult and children's activities at their local public libraries and encouraged to sign up for cards and to attend story hours when possible with their children. A variety of book

lists were distributed recommending age appropriate books available at the public library.

Objective 4

To emphasize the fun of reading, participants were introduced to a variety of crafts to use with their children either before reading a book or as an enrichment activity after reading a book. (See workshop content outline)

Objective 5

All sessions provided the participants with the opportunity to read an excerpt from adult fiction or non-fiction related to the weekly theme to enhance their own reading interests. Most of these readings included multi-cultural authors.

An informal instructional approach worked best with these groups allowing time for discussion of issues that participants brought up during the course of the workshop session. A sense of humor and openness was also a necessary trait for the instructor. A traditional classroom approach would have been viewed negatively by most of the participants. It is also important to be aware that not all participants can or want to read aloud in the group setting. To avoid embarrassment, the workshop instructor should always ask for volunteers to read aloud instead of calling directly on participants. The teacher must also allow participants to express opinions so that they feel confident and comfortable in the workshop.

Attendance was usually not a problem for these groups because the bridge housing/ shelter staff required all residents to attend. When arriving late became a problem, the instructor began the practice of awarding small prizes to the first student to walk into the classroom. Prizes were also awarded to the student who had read the most books to her children. The awards gave the students a tangible goal and increased their active participation during the workshop.

A total number of **48** women benefitted as a result of their participation in this project with **98** children benefitting indirectly. The participants' average age was **26.7** years. The average grade completed in school for the participants was **11.9** .

Information concerning community adult education programs was made available to the workshop participants and staff of the bridge housing programs at the conclusion of the workshops.

EVALUATION

The project goal and objectives were evaluated weekly as well as after each of the four workshops was completed. Originally, participants were asked to keep track of their weekly family reading activities in a written journal. The participants resisted writing in the journal, claiming that this would be an invasion of their privacy. To evaluate the participants' reading at home activities, the instructor added more time to the introduction section of each workshop session to review what students had done at home with their children. Students, who brought in lists of books that they had read with their children, received special recognition each week. By the end of the six sessions, participants were more open and trusting toward the instructor and were comfortable enough to write a few sentences about what they liked and disliked about the workshop. Most acknowledged that they were spending more time reading with their children using the books that they received during the workshop. (see appendix)

Bridge housing staff were asked to evaluate the impact of the sessions on the residents who participated in the "Read Me a Story" workshops through group discussion as well as by informally observing the reading and reading related behaviors among the families on a daily basis. The written evaluations were submitted to PLI-GWI at the completion of each workshop. (see appendix)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive written evaluations and verbal comments of the participants and the bridge housing staff, validates the success of this project. The evaluations of the participants express appreciation and describe changes in their reading behavior. They were able to put their problems aside for two hours each week and spend some time learning about the importance of reading. At the end of the six weeks the participants were not only reading more to their children, but they were acting as role models for their children by reading more themselves.

The use of multi-cultural adult reading materials interested the participants who could relate to the writings of authors such as Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Jo Carson, and Richard Wright. These selections were also popular because they usually generated conversation and provided the background for a writing exercise. Even the most resistant student enjoyed writing and two of the women wrote expressive poems.

Offering snack food and beverages, craft activities to do with children, and child care during the workshop sessions also added to the success of this project. The most popular craft according to the parent evaluation was the making of a concept book. The participants used a variety of art materials to create their own book focusing on numbers, letters or colors.

The activity that did not work as well as planned was keeping a journal of reading activites in a spiral notebook. This intimidated the women because they felt it was an invasion of privacy and made them uncomfortable. This was dropped from the workshop after it failed with the groups at the YWCA in Wilkinsburg and Debra House. In order for the workshop leader to know what the participants read with their children between the weekly sessions, a discussion period was added to the beginning of each week's session to talk about what the participants had done

with their children since the last meeting. At the last workshop, the instructor asked for recommendations on how at home reading times could be recorded in a less threatening mannner. It was recommended that participants be given a monthly calender and stickers so that their children can keep track of reading activity times by putting a sticker on the days that they read a book/ story with their mothers. This would give the children a responsibility in the family reading process.

Most of the participants expressed a desire to continue attending if more sessions were available. In order to continue or expand the program after the funding ends, it is recommended that the bridge housing staff be trained to carry on the program.

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APPENDIX

I. Participant evaluations

II. Bridge Housing staff evaluations

Reading with Children program was very inspirational. Penny, the instructor gave us Alot of information, I enjoyed coming. I made my Children A book in class. They love it. Since, the class, I have started Reading to my 18 month old and my 4 month old. every night. My 18 month loves the books. Thank You, Penny

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Well I have been for only three weeks but in those three weeks I learn the Value of reading books to my son and the books that I did resieve were very interesting because I never knew it could be fun to read Childrens books. Penny was a great Help!

Thank You

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What I think of the program.
I think the Program was very good for me. before I never read to my kids now i Do No much but more than i did beforz. Penny is a good teacher i wish she could come back again.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. What was the best thing you liked about the program?
reading the stories to each others, feeling like a child again

2. What did you not like about the program? was too short

3. What was the most important thing you learned? that parents can enjoy the book with the child

4. Would you like the program to come back again?

(Yes) No

If NO why?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. What was the best thing you liked about the program? learning to read aloud with Sunny. taking time to explain the pictures in the book.

2. What did you not like about the program? the day we had groups. I would have preferred another day.

3. What was the most important thing you learned? to talk to Sunny about pictures and let him tell me how he feels.

4. Would you like the program to come back again?

(Yes) No

If NO why?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. What was the best thing you liked about the program?
Reading The Snowman Book and Making The Books for Our Children

2. What did you not like about the program?
I like The Program

3. What was the most important thing you learned?
Being Able To Participate in A grp + have fun.

4. Would you like the program to come back again?
(Yes) No

If NO why?

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YWCA
Greater Pittsburgh

January 5, 1993

Bridge Housing Program
P.O. Box 8645
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15221
(412) 371-2723

Ms. Shelli Glanz
Program Supervisor
Goodwill Industries
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Dear Ms. Glanz:

I am writing to thank you for the recent series of workshops which were sponsored here regarding family literacy. The six week series was well recieved by our residents and I believe that providing a regular class such as this reinforces the concepts taught.

Penny Lang did an excellant job at making the workshop worthwhile and enjoyable for the residents. A few of the women said to me, "I like that teacher. The group is going to be fun." Penny's enthusiastic style of teaching and her sense of humour communicated that reading isn't just a chore but can be pleasurable.

A few other particular areas I wanted to point out as being successful were in terms of the resources that were used. Children's books that were multicultural were wonderful and enriching. I find myself stopping in children's stores to review one of the books we read in the class and to enjoy the pictures. Additionally, providing gift books each week, certificates of recognition, and prizes for first arrivals at group all served to build a sense of enthusiasm for the workshop. Concrete items rather than just discussing ideas are well recieved and encourage follow through of the topics discussed.

There are also two changes I would suggest. The idea of writing ones thoughts in a journal was responded to with resistance and mistrust. I myself wasn't sure of the purpose of the activity and also found it to be intrusive, as did the women. Perhaps a different form for a weekly evaluation of progress could be developed. Also, I would like to encourage a review of the stories and poems that the group read together (not the children's books) for content that was both culturally insensitive or, in one case, seemed to advocate an O.K.ness with violence against women. I couldn't remember the name of the piece I found offensive but did ask Penny to look over the resources that were used the second week.

You have a great program -- thanks for providing it here!

Sincerely,
Dana Elmendorf
Dana Elmendorf

Our Imperative:
To Eliminate Racism

A United Way Agency

Debra House

16 Holland Avenue • Braddock, PA 15104 • (412) 271-5787

Providing housing, counseling and supportive services to women and children.

3-29-93

Shelli Glanz, Program Supervisor
Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh
2600 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Dear Ms. Glanz:

Debra House/ Bridge to Independence staff and residents wish to express our appreciation to Goodwill Industries for providing the Family Literacy Program here in our facility.

We want to especially thank your staff for their services. Penny Lang was well liked as the program instructor and made the course interesting for the participants. Corletta Brown did an excellent job each week with the children, and the parents felt very comfortable with her providing the child care.

I hope the Goodwill Industries will continue to seek the funding required to continue this beneficial service to the community's homeless families residing in shelters and bridge housing programs like ours.

Sincerely,

Cindy Goodman

Cindy Goodman
Program Coordinator

cc: Corletta Brown
Penny Lang

Women's Center & Shelter
Of Greater Pittsburgh
P.O. Box 9024, Pittsburgh, PA 15224
412 687-8005 - Hotline
412 687-8017 - Administrative

May 12, 1993

Shelli Glanz
Goodwill Industries
2600 E. Carson St.--6th Fl.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15206

Dear Ms. Glanz:

We, at Women's Center & Shelter would like to take the time to thanky you and your organization for the six week session that was designed to teach mothers how to read to their children. The simplistic manner in which this program was implemented allowed the women who were reading at a basic level themselves to participate.

Experiencing reading allowed and using voice inflection was an empowering factor, especially for women whose academic accomplishments are few.

The trainer, Penny, was excellent and used her skills to make the process fun. Group cohesiveness and purpose was maintained. Consequently, we received a lot of positive feed back, such as; "I never realized reading could be that interesting" and "I'm going to spend more time reading to my child."

This project is one that we hope will continue.

Sincerely,

Betty Lane

Betty Lane
Shelter Supervisor

United Way

SOJOURNER HOUSE
5460 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
(412) 441-7783

June 18, 1993

Shelley Glanz
Goodwill Industries
Pgh Literacy Initiative
2600 East Carson
Pgh, PA 15203

Dear Shelley:

This is letter of support and thanks for choosing Sojourner House to be a part of your Read-A-Loud Project.

The staff of Sojourner House found that your program was very interesting and helpful to most mothers. At first mothers were very reluctant to go to the program because it was mandatory for all women. Some moms complained because they felt that they already knew how to read to their children. It was discovered that for many moms it was a stress reliever, to some it was educational and to others it was a way to get away from their kids.

All of the women talked about how interesting it was, how much they enjoyed the books and how much fun it was. Also, the women talked about how proud they were to be a part of the graduation ceremony.

The only problem staff saw with the program was the gift giveaway. We feel all gifts should be of equal value or not at all especially since jealousy is a big issue here at Sojourner House.

Given this information, I think it would be helpful if we start planning now for your return in the fall.

Enclosed you will find promised surveys from the women. Please contact me for any further information and to set up a fall schedule.

Sincerely,

Jo Ann English
Child Development Specialist

Enclosures

A Program of East End Cooperative Ministry
250 North Highland Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
(412) 361-5549